

What we Heard Edmonton Transit Service - Fare Assistance Programs

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Primary Contributors

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Prepared for:

Edmonton Transit Service, City of Edmonton

+ the communities they serve and the agencies they partner with.

We hope this data is useful for reflection and action for all of the stakeholders involved.

Acknowledgements:

We appreciate the wisdom and insight shared from both community-serving organizations and community members in this consultation.

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Introduction & Context Setting

Edmonton Transit Services provides three fare assistance programs:

RIDE TRANSIT PROGRAM

The Ride Transit Program was launched in 2017 to provide greater access to Edmonton Transit Service by reducing financial barriers for individuals and families in Edmonton. The program provides subsidized Adult and Youth monthly passes to eligible Edmontonians.

DONATE-A-RIDE (DAR)

The DAR program distributes single use transit tickets to local agencies that serve low-income individuals. The purpose is to support those who need short term transportation support.

PROVIDING ACCESSIBLE TRANSIT HERE (PATH)

The PATH program provides free monthly transit passes to agencies that support individuals who are homeless or are at high risk of homelessness.

Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) has undertaken several reviews of three ETS fare assistance programs (Ride Transit Program, Donate-A-Ride, and Providing Accessible Transit Here). Each of these reviews have provided some recommendations for ETS to consider (see [Appendix A](#)).

Purpose of this document and the background on the current consultation (July 2021)

As outlined in Appendix A, ETS has acted on a number of recommendations from previous consultations, however, they recognize that there is much more that could be done to be responsive to communities that could benefit, or do benefit, from access to fare reduction programs.

ETS, in collaboration with Equity in Action, engaged community organizations who either a) serve populations who would benefit from participation in these programs or b) have clients who already participate in these programs.

The objectives of further ETS community engagement were to:

- inform external agencies of these programs if they aren't already aware of them
- provide a summary of what they've heard through previous reviews and actions they've undertaken since then
- gain further insight and depth on recommendations that ETS could act upon

Equity in Action brought extensive experience working as consultants and colleagues with these agency stakeholders. In addition, we bring a deep understanding of anti-racism and equity that could benefit this community engagement. Our goal was to design the engagement in such a way that not only allows ETS to meet its objectives for this engagement, but would be a solid foundation for a sustained collaborative working relationship with relevant community agencies that would benefit ETS in its upcoming anti-racism projects.

Our consultation goal was to ensure the data gathered from this engagement is useful and relevant, that both community and ETS learn about how to work better with one another to ensure accessibility of this program to populations that need them, and for increased clarity and understanding of the current context of populations that benefit from these programs.

This document outlines the facilitation process and presents findings from the engagement. It closes with some next steps to follow from this engagement, as generated by the respondents.

Methods

A list of invitees was generated based on previous consultations, current mailing lists related to these transit programs, partners who work with ETS in the PATH program, and the consultants' understanding of the social service agencies in the non profit sector.

In total, invitations were issued to 79 agencies to participate in the focus groups.

The focus groups were held on July 14, 2022 and July 15, 2022 at the Commonwealth Community Recreation Centre, and a total of 19 individuals participated. The agencies represented a cross-section of social service agencies involved in mental health, homelessness, indigenous communities, domestic violence, youth, family services, and employment services. Participants were divided into two smaller groups to enable individuals sufficient time to contribute. The interview guides are in [Appendix B](#) of this report.

What we heard

Systems Implications

Many of the respondents' description of their experiences with this program point to the incredible value of transportation in people's lives who can't afford it. They highlighted how transportation is foundational to individuals being able to access all of the supports and resources in a community for well-being.

"If you want people to feel like they are active members of the community, they need transportation. it is a right not a privilege, they need it to participate."

Transportation not only influences the ability of individuals to access community supports and resources, but it directly has an impact on individuals' isolation, physical health, mental health and economic well-being. ETS should be aware and highlight how transportation is fundamental to citizens' quality of life, especially within the scope of a municipality's responsibility, although it is not traditionally seen as an "outcome" of effective transit systems.

Discussion Topic 1: Fit of ETS Fare Reduction Programs and Client Needs

Please comment on: To what extent do the type of fare products under the 3 programs meet your client needs?

- For the most part, the combination of three programs meet the needs of clients, with some gaps to be identified below. The checks and balances and overall structure of the PATH program is quite strong.
- Agencies appreciated that the youth passes cover up to 24 years of age.

Suggestion 1: Create a temporary pass for individuals who don't yet have access to paperwork that enables them to participate in the Ride Transit program, but still need consistent transportation for more than one or two rides. For example, someone who is looking for employment would need to be out in the community looking for opportunities all day. There should be specific exploration into how a

temporary pass could be used to support someone applying for AISH, as that program often takes 6-8 months.

Suggestion 2: Explore the possibility of a fully subsidized pass for those on AISH. AISH income is very limited and a bus pass would enable access for that individual to other needed supports in the community (i.e. food bank, employment supports, thrift store). Some agencies make a one-time exception and provide a monthly pass for someone on AISH (who is also somewhere on the “precariously housed” spectrum)... but it’s an ongoing need as many people on AISH cannot afford the Ride Transit subsidized pass. It becomes a real challenge to the agency to manage limited resources based on the lived experiences of need and the intersectionality of oppressions in people’s lives.

Suggestion 3: Agencies understand there is limited budget to support these products and sometimes, funders, in recognition of the value of transportation, allow agencies to allocate their budget to buying bus tickets and bus passes. It would be useful to have discounted products available to non-profit organizations and social service agencies if their clients aren’t formally applying to the Ride Transit or PATH programs. Some agencies are supplementing transit needs with their own operational dollars as they recognize the importance of transportation for their clients.

Suggestion 4: The PATH program works very well for some agencies, but some agencies described a need for more passes. Agencies also described routinely running out of bus tickets for Donate-A-Ride each month. Particularly with Donate-A-Ride, the number of tickets distributed through that program don’t reflect the true need - but more the *anticipated need* that agencies have identified at the annual application date. Many contextual factors can change what the “true need” is throughout the year and it is hard to build an accurate projection on an annual basis.

Suggestion 5: The City of Edmonton could do some deeper exploration on how well youth in care are able to access transit. Agencies described that technically, the province should be buying and providing a bus pass to youth. While youth in care

are eligible for PATH, some agencies are hesitant to have youth access this without checking with their social worker first - as there is a perception there are a “limited number of PATH passes” available. However, some social workers only give passes to youth conditionally - contingent on behaviors - OR ask them to pick up the passes (which isn’t accessible to youth, since they don’t have transportation). It would also be good to clarify if this eligibility criteria applies to youth who are 18-21, or only under 18 years.

Suggestion 6: Create a “last resort” option for agencies to support users to access the program if they don’t have access to documentation. For example, in the past agencies could write a letter to suggest an individual should be eligible for a program. The City of Edmonton might want to look at the criteria required for the provincial program “Safer Spaces” that enables domestic violence victims to end tenancy for some suggestions of practices that enable accessibility to a program in absence of formal paperwork.

Suggestion 7: Provide a free transit pass for all newcomers (refugee, skilled worker, etc.) for the first 3-4 months.

Newcomers are “selected” by the federal government. Skilled workers often get the impression that the government has hand picked them for their skills and the contributions they will make to the economy. But the reality of their settlement experience is very different. They think they will get a job in the first month but it often takes several months and sometimes closer to a year (and often not to find employment as a “skilled worker” in the field they expected to work in). Individual tickets (DAR program) are helpful but a pass for the first 3-4 months of settlement (for the whole family) would make a big difference in successful settlement and integration. Keep in mind that all newcomers can be hesitant to ask for services such as free transit, even if they need it. They don’t want to ask for a “handout.”

Refugee youth don’t qualify for PATH but they are often referred to PATH agencies because they don’t have the \$35 for the Ride Transit program. We don’t know where to send them to meet their needs.

- What would be the impact of following through on this suggestion?
 - When families and individuals are stressed out and experiencing financial hardship/poverty, it costs the social system/society more than a bus pass. Even family violence in newcomer communities can be tied to stress related to income.

Suggestion 8: Clarify for agencies that they might be eligible for *both* Donate-a-Ride (DAR) and PATH. There was some confusion among agencies as to how they could best serve their clients/community members through a combination of the two programs. In addition, even if people are not experiencing houselessness, they may not have any funds for transportation; therefore, providing free monthly bus passes to agencies that don't qualify for PATH would also be helpful.

- *What would be the impact of following through on this suggestion?*
 - People could get their kids to daycare so they could work more consistently, etc.

* Agencies would appreciate the opportunity to discuss this question more in depth. They described that it is easy to say that a "program is working" because that is the only program they have been given and they make it work. However, the opportunity to really go into how well it's meeting all the gaps of their clients would be appreciated.

Discussion Topic 2: Eligibility

Please comment on what's working or what needs to be improved with respect to eligibility criteria.

Suggestion 1: LICO – increase the threshold for a subsidized transit pass. Currently people/households who are at 10-25% above LICO are eligible, but with the current inflationary pressures, there are many individuals and families that could benefit from a subsidized transit pass. If ETS wanted to explore increasing access to fare reduction programs (Ride Transit specifically), it was suggested that checking in with frontline/service industry workers would be a good measure to see if transit affordability measures need to be adjusted. These types of roles have hourly wages that are usually not adjusted for inflation and are precarious in the number of hours available based on the current state of the economy.

- *What would be the impact of following through on this suggestion?*
 - Less people would be coming in for assistance with basic needs (e.g. only able to access food that is beyond the best before date) because they could reduce their budget for transit. People are trading food for transportation and vice versa.

Suggestion 2: Review eligibility for families/individuals in transition (e.g. family break-up, from houseless to housing).

"I know of a family where the wife and kids had to leave with nothing. Her partner is restricting access to funds because everything they had was a joint account. And their joint income is high, so she qualifies for nothing [in terms of fare reduction] even though she has nothing"

When an 18-year-old comes off of the family's Ride Transit/LAP application, they have no tax return. They need a Notice of Assessment for LAP and transit access. It would be great if there were a way to fill in the gap until tax time.

The impact on families and the system: the 18-year-olds start getting transit tickets. The impact on the family is that they have to find money to pay for a pass. The family trade-offs are often groceries. Sometimes the kids aren't attending school and then the parents get calls from the school... this all adds to family stress.

Suggestion 3: Could WCB recipients be added to the list of possible criteria for eligibility?

Suggestion 4: Work with Housing First to ensure there is a free bus pass for people who were houseless and then were recently moved to housing. In this transitional time, it is critical for people to maintain their access to transit.

We know of clients who transition to housing and then lose all their transportation supports. Sometimes they will try to take the bus and hope that the bus driver lets them on or they ride the train without being able to pay for a ticket. They just hope that they don't get caught. We know that many people are hesitant to do this and would rather follow the rules of the system. There are social impacts for people in this situation – they can't access their social supports and community that keeps their wellbeing intact *and* there are general barriers in accessing what you need.

Insight 1: People on Income Support are not eligible for PATH but the trade-off is food or transportation. One group that was specifically mentioned was families with young children.

"Families with young children don't have the means that other families have. They are always making so many trade-offs. I would rather give them a DAR ticket than to know that they won't have food"

Insight 1A: (related to application process but also directly related to the comments above): we are seeing increased mental health challenges in our client groups and this makes this "coordination of basic needs" process so much more difficult (e.g. a family has to go to one agency for food, another for a bus ticket (which they will get if their child attends a program at a specific place), and then they go to another

agency for school supplies for their kids, somewhere else to get job search support... and it goes on and on).

Insight 3: Families or people who are trying to make ends meet by living together and collaborating on basic needs, sometimes they lend a pass to someone else in the household as a way of sharing resources. But this is a tradeoff since they both need transportation. It might mean that a parent can't get a child to a program where a child will also get food. Expanding eligibility would mitigate these trade-off situations.

Insight 4: Many people do not feel safe on transit (especially people who face multiple societal barriers, for example, Black Muslim women and younger youth who are houseless) and so people who are eligible for fare reduced passes, and who need them, do not access the program.

Young youth (14-20 years old) don't feel safe going downtown (areas like Boyle Street, etc.) on transit. Some of the youth services are on the south side of the river and services are concentrated in the city core. There is a lot of distance between the services needed and where we are located (especially since youth are attempting to get to these services on foot as they don't feel safe on transit). The impact is that some youth don't go to shelters and try to stay up all night. They will sometimes smoke meth just so they can stay up all night and try to ensure they won't be robbed. This (not going to a shelter) means they also won't be able to access a meal. Life for these youth is going from one agency to the next to fulfil their basic needs and not accessing transit makes this journey even more difficult.

Discussion Topic 3: Application Process

What is working well and what could be improved with respect to the application process?

Suggestion 1: Build in coordination with the Income Support office. Could there be a quick check-in to make sure the information is still accurate (e.g. verify that the client is still on Income Support) – streamline the renewal process.

Suggestion 2: Use the GBA+ lens on the application process to ensure the program is accessible to those who have the “lived” experience of poverty and acknowledge the barriers that individuals face every day.

Agencies ask the City to remember that the lived experience of poverty is very different from the “status” of poverty. If you have been in poverty for a long time, and experience some of the determinants of health that lead to poverty, then the trauma of these experiences can impact one's ability to fill out forms and/or there can be trauma from filling out so many forms.

“Remember the program should be designed for the citizen’s needs not for the city”

Suggestion 3: Provide agencies with a template letter where agencies could efficiently inform the City of refugee status, etc. and then the application process could move more quickly (e.g how Income Support does it).

Suggestion 3A: Develop a partnership with Income Support, AISH and other provincial or federal partners. Initiate the process to get transit access right there. Could there be an automated approach where we access data from the federal government on who is eligible instead of making people apply?

There was an understanding that to demonstrate eligibility for Ride Transit (or affiliated programs like Leisure Access Pass), users have to have a notice of assessment to confirm their financial eligibility. Agencies described many reasons why tax assessments could not be completed. (i.e. abusive partner holding all financial documents, identification has been lost).

The program should also recognize that AISH incomes are very limited and the process to vett AISH recipients is quite thorough.

If tax assessments are not required for Ride Transit applications, there needs to be very clear communication on the actual documents that are needed to demonstrate eligibility (for example, can an individual bring an AISH cheque as evidence they are on AISH?)

Also - notice of assessments aren't even reflective of the person's current situation. For example if someone lost their job in jan 2022, their tax assessment reflects their situation in 2020.

- *What would be the impact of following through with these suggestions?*
 - People would have to wait less and would have to travel around less to secure a fare reduction option.

Suggestion 3B: For the Notice of Assessment part of Ride Transit, it would be great if there was a consent form to access the information directly or for ETS to have a sharing agreement with CRA.

Suggestion 4: For Ride Transit, we spend so much time on forms, so we really appreciate the more simplified process and the online access. If we could email in the forms, that would make the process even better.

Suggestion 5A: If the form were simplified and agencies could email it in, then it would also be great if agencies could print out a temporary pass for clients until they get their official one from ETS.

Suggestion 5B: When considering the simplicity of forms for Ride Transit, it would be great for ETS to also consider how long it takes to coordinate with other programs (e.g. LAP) and then set a service standard for getting the passes (i.e. what would that process of "designing backward from the desired outcome" tell you about how the forms or process should be streamlined?)

Suggestion 5C: [Related to simplicity and clarity of forms] When clients have language barriers, agencies often have to find another agency/partner to support

the client with the application. If there were translated versions, and if the English and translated versions aligned exactly, then that might help. Newcomers with low literacy sometimes also do not apply because they are not comfortable or familiar with application processes (or try to avoid them).

- Impact of this process is that applicants who have language/literacy barriers have to wait longer to get a transit pass

Insight 1: Many people who need access to fare reduced transit have trouble filling out the Leisure Access Pass (LAP)/Ride Transit application form. When a language barrier is involved, there are added challenges of translation.

Insight 2: It can take a lot of time to get LAP approval and then a transit pass. Also getting a Notice of Assessment can take a lot of time. (What is the impact on families who qualify for subsidized or free transit and really need to actively use the transit system, but have to wait weeks or months to use public transportation?)

Insight 3: Some applicants have a fear of providing personal info or documentation to an “official” in an agency. This could be due to premigration histories or other factors. Some people are more uncomfortable with sitting with someone in an office and seeing them inputting their personal information online than filling out a paper form together.

Insight 4: Some people are banned from Edmonton Public Library and other spaces where they could access the internet. Having the most simplified form possible for online application would really benefit these users as they may only be able to access the application briefly on a mobile or through a paper form. Mailing things out on the spot would also be helpful.

Discussion Topic 4: Supports for Users

What is working well with respect to support for users? What could be improved?

Suggestion 1: Can users get Ride Transit passes or PATH through mobile access (on their phone)? When people are sleeping outside in the rain, for example, it is easy for a piece of paper to get destroyed.

Suggestion 2: Explore easier access for people/agencies to hand in the forms besides mailing it in or going downtown.

“Our dream would be that someone from ETS comes to our agency. We tell all the eligible clients to come that day. And then we do all the applications, verifications, and hand out passes on the same day.”

Big Dreams as it relates to eligibility and access:

- 1 | Provide free transit for all.** People can access transportation whenever they need it, there would be more riders – and no “red tape” for the people who most need to access public transit. Adopt the Edmonton Public Library model – free library cards and no questions asked. Look at Toronto model for recreation centres – everyone can use them at no cost. How could this be adopted for a transit model (in terms of how they do budgeting and access to make this happen).
- 2 | Provide an unlimited supply for agencies to be given out at their discretion** (and it would be great if there were different options (single ticket, weekly pass, etc.) and that the agency could print them out right then and there.
- 3 | Provide a free family pass for families with kids in the 0-6 age range,** but link it to agency connection (“you can have this pass as long as you stay connected with us”). Make the family pass “open” – children are often accompanied by family members that are not their parents or by community members that are like family.
- 4 | Institute a “pay-what-you-can” system.** The impact would be that people would have access to transit whether they were experiencing poverty/houselessness or not.
- 5 | Create a PATH annual pass.** This would greatly reduce the administrative burden on agencies. The work to get users connected to PATH is unfunded work for the agencies and can take significant staff time.
- 6 | Provide a Daily Pass within the DAR system.** The impact on users is that they wouldn’t have to find a new ticket to go to different services or places. If there was a daily pass, then they could try to do all their “agency business” in one day. Perhaps staff members at agencies could stamp your DAR ticket – it would still be active as long as it had a stamp.
- 7 | Provide free transit hours at low rider times throughout the city** (not just downtown, as was a previous policy).

Discussion Topic 5: Supports and Accessibility of Program for Agencies

What is working well with respect to agencies accessing these fare reduction programs? What could be improved?

Suggestion 1: Most agencies described that the time their staff spend in supporting community members to access these ETS Fare Reduction Programs is a valid part of their job description. However, any efforts to reduce the amount of *tracking* would be helpful for staff and reduce the time needed. For example, the DAR reporting process is very simple and straightforward and a great example of what meets the needs of agencies' context. However, for the PATH program, agencies need to individually submit the information for each person. One of the agencies has 200 applicants and has them on a giant spreadsheet. It would be time saving if she could simply submit the spreadsheet rather than enter each individual into the PATH program.

Suggestion 2: (related to the DAR application process) It is hard to gauge needs for transit once a year, especially in the context we're in now – pandemic and post-pandemic, inflation, etc. It would be great if ETS took the pulse of needs more than once a year. The City should be aware that funding for programs varies for nonprofits throughout the year. It is very common for agencies to learn about successful funding for a new program (and participants who need bus tickets) in any month of the year (i.e. funding agencies do not give out money for programs only once a year). One agency described how they ration their bus tickets out per week so that they have at least some every week. Their number of bus ticket distribution then reflects the “supply”, rather than the “demand”.

- Could there be quarterly orders for tickets (DAR) and then you could adjust the agency's requests, hopefully reducing the situation where agencies are holding expired tickets?
- Could there be a system to trade among agencies so the tickets are going where there is high demand (and genuine need)? For example, sometimes non-for-profits suddenly lose funding for a program that they had for a while. They might be holding on to tickets but have less accessibility to the people

who need those tickets since they are no longer attending programs there. It would be great to redistribute those tickets to agencies who are using their own funds to subsidize DAR.

- Could there be an online ordering portal and you could order as you needed to?

Suggestion 3: Provide more clarity to agencies on eligibility for the different programs. There was confusion about who would qualify to be a PATH agency, for example.

Agencies also needed more clarity on program requirements, for example, what is the City's definition of "precariously housed?" Some agencies knew about this term within the PATH program and interpreted "precariously housed" in different ways. Other agencies thought that they could only work within a strict definition of "homelessness" for people accessing the PATH program. For example, someone who is on AISH income might be stably housed but they might still be at risk of homelessness for many reasons.

Suggestion 4: Interestingly enough, many of the agencies who participated in this focus group learned or were reminded about the fare reduction programs through the email invitation to the focus group. There could be stronger approaches to keeping agencies reminded and updated on the availability of these programs.

An outreach program for these fare transit reduction programs would be great. The turnover in non profits is very high. If we could invite a speaker out to our staff, then this would support agency access to the program.

Respondents also said the monthly meetings regarding PATH made things more clear. For Ride Transit, it was more difficult for agencies to know what was happening and any updates to Ride Transit. They were wondering if there could be communication through the FCSS tables or other interagency groups (perhaps an outreach Edmonton Transit employee could attend those sessions)? (Please note, these interagency groups were also described as a good venue to raise program awareness - see section below).

Many agencies were also unaware that you can pick up your RT bus pass as well as LAP at a recreation centre.

Suggestion 5: There has been some misunderstanding of what agencies can provide to users because of how “lists of agencies” are currently published. For example, my organization only provides bus tickets to clients, and we often have people coming to our office stating that they would like to get free bus tickets because they saw our agency name on a list. If the City of Edmonton could be more deliberate about creating and releasing lists for agencies on if they would like to be publicly listed as providing individuals with bus tickets and/or bus passes, this would be helpful. Such a question could be asked as part of the application process.

Suggestion 6: Review DAR expiration dates, especially if there could be a process to redistribute or extend the date for year-end leftovers. Many not-for-profits are closed for a few weeks during the holidays and can’t get tickets out to those that need them.

Discussion Topic 6: Program Awareness

What are some recommendations to ensure these programs get to Edmontonians who need it?

Some recommendations included:

- social media
- faith groups
- any kind of gathering that you would usually see City of Edmonton staff at (i.e. Pet Expo, KDays)
- food bank centers
- interagency tables, such as those convened by FCSS
- thrift stores
- Pay Day Loan Centers
- family resource centers
- Homeless Connect and/or Youth Connect
- youth sports groups
- outreach groups like Water Warriors and Bear Clan, AAWEAR
- radio announcements
- Edmonton Federation of Community Leagues
- coordinating distribution of information with settlement agencies who provide orientation to Edmonton services to newcomers OR adding it to current welcome / orientation packages for newcomers

Respondents particularly commented on how some Edmontonians do not want to engage with agencies. In these cases, it is important to find places that Edmontonians can't *help* but see this information, such as:

- medicentres
- hospitals including glenrose and the stollery
- doctors' offices
- transit centres
- shopping malls

- grocery stores
- public parks

Respondents also wanted to remind the city that people who are often in most need of this information are often in crisis. They recommended keeping the messages short, simple, and with an appropriate literacy level.

Respondents also suggested that some of this information could be integrated into some of the agencies' intake processes, if they were willing to do so.

Respondents also identified that the information networks in non-profits are informal and network based. We often have interagency email list groups (i.e. Indigenous Relations at City of Edmonton, Inglewood network, Health for 2 Network, West Side Interagency, Community Liaison Communities, STDII Collaboration Zone, Edmonton Local Immigration Partnership, End Poverty Edmonton). They recommended that the city tap into these interagency networks.

Other

There were some other discussion topics that did come up that respondents would like Edmonton Transit to consider for future consultation:

- Distance between bus stops for the new transit system. One family reported walking 30 minutes to their bus stop.
- The new electronic bus pass:
 - Consider having photos on them; this makes it less likely to be a target of theft
- People who need to transport things like chairs or larger objects, and have no other access to transportation, are not allowed to transport those things on public transit.
- Some people ride the bus because it's warm and a safe place to sleep... but they get fines because they are unable to pay.

Next Steps

Some of the next steps suggested by respondents included:

- summarize this report into key findings for public sharing back to participants, along with clarifications
- consider making these notes sharable as then they can share it with their staff and co-workers for further validation and/or ideas
- have a mailing list with agencies we identified in order to share updates, along with specific people who attended this session
- explore options for engaging users of the program
- explore options for bringing back this group to co-design solutions for some of the more complex issues that have emerged; agencies have access to community members and have richer data and access to potential solutions.
- re-invite agencies for another consultation, especially if you need stories about the context of users of this program; our frontline staff have this access

Conclusion

In summary, the engagement conducted in July 2022 provided an opportunity for community agencies to not only provide feedback on areas of strength and opportunities for growth in the ETS Fare Reduction Programs, it also created space for stakeholders to describe the “realities” of the lives of their clients which directly affect their use and accessibility to these programs. Both ETS and respondents expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to dialogue on these important issues and see the value of similar engagement processes in the future.

Appendix A: ETS Summary of Previous Consultations

Previous reviews included:

2018 | AndersonDraper Consulting undertook an evaluation of the Ride Transit Program. Data collection included surveys to 700 passholders and engagement with 7 external organizations.

The purpose was to better understand the impact and barriers of the Ride Transit Program. The final report provided recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of Ride Transit and reduce barriers.

2020 | The City of Edmonton engaged Civitas Consulting in 2020 to conduct a review of the DAR and PATH programs to complement the findings from the Ride Transit Evaluation report. Over 30 agencies provided feedback on the programs along with 300+ PATH participants. The review provided insights on the social impact of DAR and PATH, program gaps, and recommendations to increase the impact of the programs.

2021 | Following a City Council motion in 2021 to conduct an Anti-Racism review of low-income fare programs, the City entered into an agreement with the Centre for Race and Culture to identify barriers for racialized and Indigenous Edmontonians to access these programs and provide recommendations. The study included four focus groups with agencies and interviews with program participants.

The powerpoint presentation that follows provides a summary of what ETS heard from the community and what they've put into place as a response to those consultations.



Introduction

Edmonton Transit Service (ETS) is conducting a review of its fare assistance programs to make the programs more accessible and inclusive. ETS runs three fare assistance programs to support low-income and vulnerable population groups in Edmonton:

RIDE TRANSIT	DONATE-A-RIDE (DAR)	PATH
The Ride Transit Program launched in 2017 to provide greater access to ETS. The program provides subsidized Adult and Youth monthly passes to eligible Edmontonians.	The Donate A Ride (DAR) program distributes single use transit tickets to local agencies that serve low-income individuals for short-term transportation support. The program has been entirely funded by the City since 2018.	The PATH (Providing Accessible Transit Here) program provides free monthly transit passes to agencies that support individuals who are homeless or are at high risk of homelessness.

Edmonton

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Program Eligibility Criteria

RIDE TRANSIT	DAR	PATH
<p>TIER 1: RIDE BASIC Provides a \$35 monthly pass to individuals and families with household incomes less than LICO + 10%, OR those that qualify from one of the criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> → AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped) recipient → CPP-Disability Benefit recipient → Government Income Support recipient → Learner Income Support recipient → New Permanent Resident → Refugee Status → Child under government care → Government Employment Insurance <p>TIER 2: RIDE LITE & RIDE PLUS Provide a \$50 monthly pass to individuals and families with household incomes 10% to 25% above the LICO.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Agencies with low income clients who are in need of urgent, short term transit support. → Applications are open once a year and agencies receive quantities of the Adult ticket booklet (10 ticket) valid until the end of the year. → Staff working at the agencies distribute the tickets to their clients at their discretion. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → Agencies that offer drop-in day shelter services to adults who are experiencing homelessness or at risk of homelessness. → Staff working at the distribution agencies work closely with individuals to determine eligibility for a monthly pass. → The program is relationship-based. Agencies regularly collaborate with the City and partnering organizations.

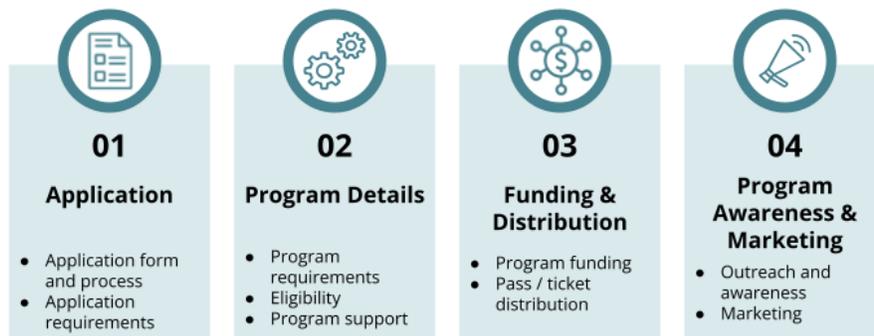
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Past Program Reviews and Engagement

Over the past few years, the City of Edmonton has commissioned consultants to conduct reviews of ETS fare assistance programs. The reviews included engagement with representatives from agencies that provide support to low-income and vulnerable populations.

Recommendations from engagement sessions were categorized into four themes:



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01 Application



What We Heard

RIDE TRANSIT (subsidized passes)

- Review and update the application form for readability, length and ease of use.
- Provide application support at Edmonton Service Centre.
- Develop an online fillable application form that can be submitted electronically.
- Provide temporary passes to applicants that have a letter of support from an agency explaining an applicant's situation.
- Translate program application form and program material into the most common languages in Edmonton.
- Offer additional assistance to clients who do not speak English well.



What We Did

RIDE TRANSIT

- The City is launching an online application for the Ride Transit and Leisure Access Programs towards the end of 2022.
- The online application will have a 90-day pause, allowing applicants to start filling out the online form, save it, and continue at a later time.
- 311 can provide additional information and answer inquired from program participants and applicants.
- The application was simplified in 2020; verification requirements for address, spousal information and eligible dependents became a declaration form.
- The application form is reviewed by annually and was most recently updated in March 2022.
- The online application launching towards the end of 2022 will allow for translation opportunities through translation software.

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02 Program Details



What We Heard

RIDE TRANSIT (subsidized passes)

- Make the income eligibility criteria for Ride Transit the same as the requirements for Leisure Access Program to address the relationship and shared processes between them.
- In addition to the low-income cut-off and AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped), consider alternative eligibility qualifiers.
- Integrate income verification with other levels of government offering services to the same population group.

PATH (free passes - homelessness sector)

- Re-examine requirement of returning previous bus pass, as some individuals lose bus passes.

PATH (free passes - homelessness sector) and DAR (bus tickets)

- Establish a single point of contact for agencies / individuals to provide ongoing support and answer inquiries.



What We Did

RIDE TRANSIT

- In 2019, the Ride Transit implemented a two-tiered sliding scale model to allow households with incomes up 10% - 25% above LICO receive a discounted transit pass. Seven additional program qualifiers were also added to the Ride Transit to make the program more accessible.
- Those that may be eligible for the Leisure Access Program and not the Ride Transit program include:
 - ◆ A child 6 years old or younger
 - ◆ A Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) card holder, as they get free transit
 - ◆ 26% above the LICO or unable to provide income verification documentation
 - ◆ A child under government care who receives a transit pass from Child and Family Services

PATH and DAR

- The City is currently in the process of developing a program manager position that would become the single point of contact for both DAR and PATH.

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03 Funding and Distribution



What We Heard

RIDE TRANSIT (subsidized passes)

- Review feasibility of current pick up locations and consider additional locations.
- Establish a connection with Alberta Works and Support Centres for promotion and pass pick up.
- Utilize Edmonton Public Library as pick up locations.

PATH (free passes - homelessness sector) and DAR (bus tickets)

- Provide more tickets and passes to agencies.
- Compensate agency staff for their time to distribute passes and tickets to clients.
- Explore partnerships with other groups or levels of government for program promotion, administration, and distribution.



What We Did

RIDE TRANSIT

- In 2020, the City introduced new contactless sales mediums for Ride Transit participants.
- The auto-debit option of the Ride program expanded to include participants who are not exclusively AISH recipients.
- An online website was also created allowing approved participants to create an online account that would allow them to access the discounted fare product for themselves and their families.

PATH and DAR

- In 2020, the number of monthly PATH passes available increased from 600 to 1,900 to align with the City's houseless population estimates.
- ETS is reviewing resource allocation for the PATH and DAR programs based on a suite of measures and feedback from program participants.

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04 Program Awareness and Marketing



What We Heard

RIDE TRANSIT, PATH and DAR

- Advertise the program in the community.
- Use different communication channels to target different customer groups such as newcomers, youth not currently enrolled in school, and low-income residents who do not receive agency support.

PATH (free passes - homelessness sector) and DAR (bus tickets)

- Expand program administration beyond social agencies; find more avenues people could use to get access to the program.



What We Did

RIDE TRANSIT, PATH and DAR

- The City is currently assessing ways to increase awareness of all three fare assistance programs.
- ETS is developing a marketing and communications plan for all three fare assistance programs.
- ETS is also engaging agencies to support the development of specific action plans for marketing the programs.

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Appendix: Key Facts and Figures

RIDE TRANSIT		DAR	PATH
37,807 Eligible Purchasers <i>(Year End 2021)</i>	12,200 Adult Passes Sold <i>(December 2021)</i>	50+ Participating Agencies <i>(2021)</i>	15+ Participating Agencies <i>(2021)</i>
\$772 Average Annual Savings Per Rider <i>(2021)</i>	2,300 Youth Passes Sold <i>(December 2021)</i>	63,160 Tickets Distributed <i>(2021)</i>	1,900 Monthly Passes Available <i>(2021)</i>
\$10.4M Total Savings for Riders <i>(2021)</i>	86% Participants Agreed Ride Transit is Affordable <i>(2021)</i>	\$175,269 Total Retail Value of Tickets Distributed <i>(2021)</i>	\$2.28 Million Total Retail Value of Tickets Distributed <i>(2021)</i>

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Appendix B: Consultation Questions

Each question was asked in small circle discussions. Participants were offered a number of different ways to respond – writing on sticky notes, sharing thoughts with the group, and building off of each other’s ideas.

Before engaging in the discussion, participants reviewed the data and recommendations that emerged through previous consultations in the topic area and how ETS has responded so far (see Appendix A).

Eligibility

Questions:

Please comment on what’s working OR what needs to be improved with respect to eligibility criteria.

Application & Supports for Users

Questions:

What is working well with respect to the application process? What could be improved?

What is working well with respect to supports for users? What could be improved?

Probing Questions:

Ride Transit (subsidized passes)

- accessibility of their pick up locations
- online store for subsidized passes
- telephone store for subsidized passes

PATH Program (organizations that serve the unhoused)

Currently, if clients want a free bus pass via the PATH program, they have to access one of the agencies downtown that uses the PATH program. Please comment on the accessibility of this approach for clients

Can you comment on the requirement of returning the previous bus pass for users of the PATH program

Fit of Program for Clients and Supports for Agencies

At this table, we are looking for a) fit of these programs with what your clients need and b) factors affecting your organization in using these programs

Questions:

To what extent do the type of fare products provided (i.e. monthly passes, ticket booklets) under the three programs meet your clients' needs?

(probe for information on "demand" as well as "fit")

Questions:

What is working well & what could be improved so AGENCIES use these programs for their clients?

In your experience, has your organization needed any resources, staff supports or other supports to help clients access these programs

(probe, do not write) There was a recommendation for agency staff to be compensated for their time to distribute passes and tickets to clients. Could you comment on that?

Program Awareness

Questions:

How did you find out about these fare assistance programs?

We want to make sure these programs get to those Edmontonians who need it the most - what would you recommend?

What other avenues would you recommend so people could access this program?

After facilitators and participants reported back on their discussions, the whole group was asked:

- Is there anything you heard that really resonates with you?
- Is there anything you heard where you have a very different experience than what was said?
- Is there anything you want to add?